

Carden Nursery and Primary School

Address: County Oak Avenue, Brighton, East Sussex, BN1 8LU

Unique reference number (URN): 131789

Inspection report: 3 March 2026

Exceptional	
Strong standard	●
Expected standard	● ● ● ● ●
Needs attention	●
Urgent improvement	

✓ Safeguarding standards met

The safeguarding standards are met. This means that leaders and/or those responsible for governance and oversight fulfil their specific responsibilities and have established an open culture in which safeguarding is everyone's responsibility and concerns are actively identified, acted upon and managed. As a result, pupils are made safer and feel safe.

How we evaluate safeguarding

When we inspect schools for safeguarding, they can have the following outcomes:

- **Met:** The school has an open and positive culture of safeguarding. All legal requirements are met.
- **Not met:** The school has not created an open and positive culture of safeguarding. Not all legal requirements are met.

Strong standard ●

Personal development and wellbeing

Strong standard ●

The school's approach to equality, diversity and inclusion is a notable strength. Pupils speak with confidence and pride about their identities and those of others. They demonstrate respect for difference and value the diversity in their community. For example, pupils support their Muslim peers during prayer times and show genuine interest in learning about each other's beliefs and traditions. Celebrations such as Eid and Traveller heritage events reflect the school's strong culture of respect for a range of cultures and faiths.

The school's pastoral provision is highly effective. Leaders provide a wide range of therapeutic and enrichment opportunities that support pupils' wellbeing. Activities such as gardening, outdoor learning, swimming, music and sport contribute positively to pupils' personal development. As a result, the school fosters a strong sense of belonging where all pupils, including those who are disadvantaged, feel valued and supported.

Leaders have established a comprehensive and carefully considered programme for personal development and wellbeing. The curriculum makes a significant contribution to pupils' wider development and helps them understand their responsibilities as members of society. Pupils learn to become responsible, respectful citizens who actively contribute to the life of the school and the wider community.

Pupils demonstrate a confident understanding of fundamental British values and show respect for protected characteristics. The school's 'empowerment' programme further strengthens pupils' character development. Pupils reflect thoughtfully on their actions and consider how their decisions affect themselves, others and the world around them. The computing curriculum supports this work effectively by teaching pupils about online safety. This helps pupils understand both the risks and benefits of social media and the internet.

Pupils develop a clear understanding of how to live healthy and safe lives. Pupils describe the school as a place where everyone is welcome. Observations of pupils' interactions with each other and with staff confirm these positive relationships.

Expected standard ●

Attendance and behaviour

Expected standard ●

Whole-school attendance has improved this year and is now just below the national average. The school has achieved impressive success with the attendance of all groups of pupils, arresting the decline seen since the COVID-19 pandemic. Leaders have worked tirelessly and diligently, going above and beyond to raise attendance. The school has faced significant attendance barriers. Some pupils have had complex medical needs and/or have started school with severe absence. Leaders analyse attendance information closely and intervene with targeted support to tackle absence. This is built on highly positive relationships with parents and carers. As a result, attendance has improved for pupils with

special educational needs and/or disabilities, disadvantaged pupils, pupils who speak English as an additional language and pupils with a range of other prior challenges.

Behaviour is consistently positive. Staff and pupils understand and uphold the school's approach. Pupils and parents are unanimously positive about behaviour, with no concerns about bullying. Pupils are friendly, polite, respectful and enthusiastic. The school only uses suspensions in exceptional circumstances. Prejudicial and derogatory language is never tolerated and always addressed robustly. Relationships and routines reflect the school values, leading to a happy, safe and harmonious school culture and environment. The school's high-quality pastoral care provides highly effective support for pupils who need help to manage their emotions.

Curriculum and teaching

Expected standard 

Leaders have designed a broad and balanced curriculum with clear end points that sets out the knowledge, skills and language pupils need for their next stages of learning. Subjects are well sequenced so that pupils build knowledge securely over time. Leaders ensure that teachers have secure subject knowledge to implement the curriculum effectively. Specialist teaching in subjects such as physical education and art strengthens pupils' experiences and supports high-quality provision.

Pupils typically develop the foundational skills they need in reading, writing and communication. Staff teach phonics effectively, helping pupils learn to read with increasing confidence and skill. Leaders have prioritised improving this provision to raise standards, and pupils are now becoming fluent readers with increasing success. Teachers place appropriate emphasis on developing pupils' spoken and written language across the curriculum. However, the quality of mathematics teaching is not yet consistently secure. End of key stage 2 outcomes for mathematics indicate that a more consistent approach to the teaching and learning of mathematics is required so that pupils develop deeper mathematical understanding.

Leaders and staff know pupils well. Teachers adapt learning appropriately for disadvantaged pupils and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities. As a result, these pupils generally make appropriate progress from their starting points, including those facing barriers such as low attendance or emotional needs.

Early years

Expected standard 

The curriculum is carefully structured to support children's progress through the early years foundation stage. Reading is prioritised from the start. Phonics teaching begins well in early years and supports children to develop secure foundations in reading and writing. Staff plan activities across the 7 areas of learning so that children build knowledge and skills over time. Children demonstrate secure recall of prior learning. For example, they talk confidently about insects and use this knowledge during continuous provision activities, such as creating bug hotels.

From the start of Nursery, staff-child interactions are purposeful and help children to develop their vocabulary. Staff model language clearly and encourage children to use full sentences in discussion and play. As a result, children develop increasing confidence in

speaking and listening. The environment supports a language-rich culture, where adults extend children's ideas and reinforce key vocabulary during daily routines and structured activities.

Children settle quickly into routines and demonstrate increasing independence in activities such as snack time and classroom organisation. This supports their readiness for the next stage of learning, including transition to Year 1. Leaders maintain positive partnerships with parents and carers and communicate regularly to support children's learning and wellbeing.

Inclusion

Expected standard 

Leaders identify and assess pupils' needs with accuracy. They use assessment information and pastoral knowledge to identify pupils who require additional support, including disadvantaged pupils and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities. Staff put plans in place to address a range of barriers to learning and wellbeing. Leaders promote a highly inclusive culture and ensure that pupils access the school's broad curriculum and wider opportunities.

Classrooms are set up to support pupils with their learning. Teachers use visual prompts, learning resources and well-considered strategies to include and support every pupil. Staff receive training to support consistent approaches across the school, but this is not yet fully embedded. Teachers adapt learning activities to meet pupils' needs, and staff provide targeted support to develop pupils' reading, writing and language skills. However, adaptive teaching is not yet consistent across lessons. Although teachers adapt tasks, they do not always address pupils' specific gaps in learning sharply enough to move learning forward.

Leaders also work with a range of external professionals and agencies to address specific barriers faced by some pupils, including refugees and pupils who have struggled to attend school elsewhere. They engage with parents and carers to ensure that support plans reflect pupils' needs and aspirations. Leaders monitor pupils' progress and review the impact of interventions. Well-informed use of pupil premium funding helps to reduce barriers for disadvantaged pupils.

Leadership and governance

Expected standard 

Leaders are dedicated and ambitious, with a clear focus on pupils' wellbeing and achievement. They demonstrate a thorough understanding of the school's strengths and areas for improvement. Leaders prioritise key actions to improve areas such as attendance and the consistency of teaching. They use assessment information and other evidence to evaluate their work and target improvement strategies effectively. Leaders make decisions that place pupils' best interests at the centre, particularly those who are disadvantaged, those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, and those who face barriers to learning or wellbeing. Leaders and staff know pupils and their families well and work closely with them to ensure that appropriate support is in place.

Leaders promote a strong culture of safeguarding and ensure that staff share a clear understanding of their responsibilities. They provide staff with professional development that is evidence informed, coherent and sustained. This supports teachers to develop their expertise and implement the curriculum effectively. Early career teachers and trainees

benefit from strong guidance and mentoring, and they feel well supported in their roles. Leaders consider staff workload and wellbeing carefully when making decisions. Staff value the support they receive and appreciate leaders' inspirational approach. They speak positively about leaders' commitment to professional development and wellbeing. This contributes to a positive working environment.

Those responsible for governance bring appropriate expertise and knowledge to their roles. Governors meet their statutory duties and manage resources effectively. They provide both support and challenge to leaders and hold them to account well for the school's performance. Through this work, governors contribute to the school's ongoing improvement and ensure that strategic decisions benefit all pupils.

Needs attention

Achievement

Needs attention 

Pupils achieve well and make impressive progress in English by the end of key stage 2. Progress scores are significantly above national averages for reading and writing. However, pupils' mathematics attainment is not as secure, with low outcomes in Year 6 national tests and the Year 4 times table check. The school is prioritising this and is focusing on improving mathematics so that it matches the success seen in reading and writing. Leaders recognise that this is necessary to fully prepare pupils for their next steps in education.

Leaders have strengthened phonics provision through close work with other schools. Catch-up is working well. All staff are trained, and pupils read well-matched texts that give them the practice they need to get on track. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and those who are disadvantaged generally achieve well across the curriculum. Pupils are flourishing in science, art and design and physical education. These are strengths of the school. Pupils also show particularly impressive recall and understanding of personal, social, health and economic education and religious education, contributing to highly positive personal development.

What it's like to be a pupil at this school

Pupils are confident, friendly and welcoming in this caring and inclusive school. Leaders and staff create a positive culture where pupils consider whether their actions are 'good for me, good for you and good for everyone'. This helps pupils to make thoughtful choices, contributing to a happy and safe community. Pupils say that 'everybody is welcome here', and this is reflected in the respectful way they treat one another. Pupils trust staff to help them if they have concerns. Pupils understand what bullying is and know that staff deal with any issues quickly and effectively. Behaviour is positive across the school as a result of high expectations and well-understood routines from Nursery to Year 6. Pupils engage well in lessons and show enthusiasm for their learning. Playtimes are active, fun and joyful, and pupils enjoy spending time with their friends.

Pupils achieve well with reading, writing and other subjects, such as art and physical education. Leaders are rightly focused on improving pupils' success with mathematics, where progress and achievement have been weaker.

Attendance is improving because of the dedication and tenacity of leaders, staff and governors. The school works closely with families to remove barriers to attendance. As a result, absence is reducing for all groups of pupils, including those who are disadvantaged and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities.

The school's approach to equality and diversity is a strength. Pupils support their peers during prayer times and embrace different beliefs and traditions. Leaders provide a strong pastoral offer that boosts pupils' wellbeing and enjoyment of school. A range of opportunities, including gardening, outdoor learning, swimming, music and sport, enrich pupils' experiences. Pupils learn about fundamental British values, online safety and healthy relationships. As a result, they develop the character and knowledge they need for the next stage of their education.

Next steps

- Leaders should ensure that the teaching of mathematics is consistently effective so that pupils achieve well.
 - Leaders should ensure that staff continue to refine how they adapt teaching so that all pupils learn as well as they can across the curriculum.
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About this inspection

The chair of the board of governors in this school is Alistair McNair.

Inspectors carried out this full inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Following our renewed inspection framework, all inspections are now led by His Majesty's Inspectors (HMIs) or by Ofsted Inspectors (OIs) who have previously served as HMIs.

Inspection activities:

Inspectors spoke with the headteacher, deputy headteacher, special educational needs and disabilities coordinator, teachers, support staff, governors, a representative from the local authority, pupils, parents and carers during the inspection.

The inspectors confirmed the following information about the school:

The school hosts a speech and language centre that supports pupils who have an education, health and care plan with a primary need of communication and interaction.

The school currently uses one registered alternative provision.

The current headteacher took up post after the last inspection.

Headteacher: Laura Sibley

Lead inspector:

Scott Reece, His Majesty's Inspector

Team inspectors:

Vanessa Mason, His Majesty's Inspector

Ulric Neblett-Leigh, His Majesty's Inspector

Facts and figures used on inspection

The data was used by the inspector(s) during the inspection. More recent data may have been published since the inspection took place.

 This data is from 3 March 2026

School and pupil context

Total pupils

366

Above average

What does this mean?

The total number of pupils currently at this school and how this compares to other schools of this phase in England.

National average: 272

School capacity

420

Above average

What does this mean?

The total number of pupils who can attend the school and how this compares to other schools of this phase in England.

National average: 300

Pupils eligible for free school meals (FSM)

42.52%

Above average

What does this mean?

The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals at any point in the last six years.

National average: 26.3%

Pupils with an education, health and care (EHC) plan

12.57%

Well above average

What does this mean?

The proportion of pupils with an education, health and care plan. This covers pupils with more support than is available through special educational needs support.

National average: 3.5%

Pupils with special educational needs (SEN) support

23.22%

Well above average

What does this mean?

The proportion of pupils with reported special educational support needs at the school.

National average: 15%

Location deprivation

Below average

What does this mean?

Based on the English Indices of Deprivation (2019) and the school's location, we have calculated whether the school is located in a more or less deprived area.

Resourced Provision or SEND Unit (if applicable)

SEN unit

What does this mean?

Whether school has Resourced Provision or SEND unit (if applicable).

Type of specialist provision (if applicable)

SLCN - Speech, language and Communication

What does this mean?

The type of Special Educational Needs provision provided at the school (if applicable).

All pupils' performance

Pupils reaching the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics

The percentage of pupils meeting the expected standards in a combined reading, writing and mathematics measure.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
Latest 3 year average	53%	61%	Below
2024/25 (revised)	50%	62%	Below
2023/24 (final)	51%	61%	Below
2022/23 (final)	58%	60%	Close to average

Pupils reaching the expected standard in reading

The percentage of pupils meeting the expected standard in reading.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
Latest 3 year average	70%	74%	Close to average

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2024/25 (revised)	67%	75%	Below
2023/24 (final)	69%	74%	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	74%	73%	Close to average

Pupils reaching the expected standard in teacher-assessed writing

The percentage of pupils meeting the expected standard in teacher-assessed writing.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
Latest 3 year average	68%	72%	Close to average
2024/25 (revised)	64%	72%	Below
2023/24 (final)	66%	72%	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	74%	71%	Close to average

Pupils reaching the expected standard in mathematics

The percentage of pupils meeting the expected standard in mathematics.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
Latest 3 year average	60%	73%	Below
2024/25 (revised)	55%	74%	Below
2023/24 (final)	60%	73%	Below
2022/23 (final)	65%	73%	Below

Disadvantaged pupils' performance

Disadvantaged pupils are those who have been eligible for free school meals at any point in the last six years and children looked after.

Disadvantaged pupils reaching the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics

The percentage of disadvantaged pupils meeting the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
Latest 3 year average	33%	46%	Below
2024/25 (revised)	40%	47%	Close to average
2023/24 (final)	25%	46%	Below
2022/23 (final)	36%	44%	Close to average

Disadvantaged pupils reaching the expected standard in reading

The percentage of disadvantaged pupils meeting the expected standard in reading.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
Latest 3 year average	55%	62%	Close to average
2024/25 (revised)	60%	63%	Close to average
2023/24 (final)	46%	62%	Below
2022/23 (final)	64%	60%	Close to average

Disadvantaged pupils reaching the expected standard in teacher-assessed writing

The percentage of disadvantaged pupils meeting the expected standard in teacher-assessed writing.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
Latest 3 year average	51%	59%	Close to average

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2024/25 (revised)	56%	59%	Close to average
2023/24 (final)	43%	58%	Below
2022/23 (final)	57%	58%	Close to average

Disadvantaged pupils reaching the expected standard in mathematics

The percentage of disadvantaged pupils meeting the expected standard in mathematics.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
Latest 3 year average	45%	60%	Below
2024/25 (revised)	48%	61%	Below
2023/24 (final)	43%	59%	Below
2022/23 (final)	43%	59%	Below

Disadvantaged pupils' performance gap

Disadvantaged pupils are those who have been eligible for free school meals at any point in the last six years and children looked after. The school disadvantage gap is the difference between the performance of the school's disadvantaged pupils compared to the performance of all non-disadvantaged pupils nationally.

Disadvantaged pupils reaching the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics

The percentage of disadvantaged pupils meeting the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics, including the disadvantaged gap.

Year	This school	National non-disadvantaged score	School disadvantage gap
Latest 3 year average	33%	68%	-35 pp
2024/25 (revised)	40%	69%	-29 pp

Year	This school	National non-disadvantaged score	School disadvantage gap
2023/24 (final)	25%	67%	-42 pp
2022/23 (final)	36%	66%	-31 pp

Disadvantaged pupils reaching the expected standard in reading

The percentage of disadvantaged pupils meeting the expected standard in reading and the disadvantaged gap.

Year	This school	National non-disadvantaged score	School disadvantage gap
Latest 3 year average	55%	80%	-24 pp
2024/25 (revised)	60%	81%	-21 pp
2023/24 (final)	46%	80%	-33 pp
2022/23 (final)	64%	78%	-14 pp

Disadvantaged pupils reaching the expected standard in teacher-assessed writing

The percentage of disadvantaged pupils meeting the expected standard in teacher-assessed writing and the disadvantaged gap.

Year	This school	National non-disadvantaged score	School disadvantage gap
Latest 3 year average	51%	78%	-27 pp
2024/25 (revised)	56%	78%	-22 pp
2023/24 (final)	43%	78%	-35 pp
2022/23 (final)	57%	77%	-20 pp

Disadvantaged pupils reaching the expected standard in mathematics

The percentage of disadvantaged pupils meeting the expected standard in mathematics and the disadvantaged gap.

Year	This school	National non-disadvantaged score	School disadvantage gap
Latest 3 year average	45%	80%	-35 pp
2024/25 (revised)	48%	81%	-33 pp
2023/24 (final)	43%	79%	-37 pp
2022/23 (final)	43%	79%	-36 pp

Absence

Overall absence

The percentage of all possible mornings and afternoons missed due to absence from school (for whatever reason, whether authorised or unauthorised) across all pupils.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2024/25 (2 term)	7.4%	5.2%	Above
2023/24 (3 term)	6.9%	5.5%	Above
2022/23 (3 term)	8.0%	5.9%	Above

Persistent absence

The percentage of pupils missing 10% or more of their possible mornings and afternoons.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2024/25 (2 term)	19.7%	13.3%	Above
2023/24 (3 term)	18.4%	14.6%	Above
2022/23 (3 term)	22.0%	16.2%	Above

Our grades explained

Exceptional

Practice is exceptional: of the highest standard nationally. Other schools can learn from it.

Strong standard

The school reaches a strong standard. Leaders are working above the standard expected of them.

Expected standard

The school is fulfilling the expected standard of education and/or care. This means they are following the standard set out in statutory and non-statutory legislation and the professional standards expected of them.

Needs attention

The expected standards are not met but leaders are likely able to make the necessary improvements.

Urgent improvement

The school needs to make urgent improvements to provide the expected standard of education and/or care.

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